UNCLE SAM INVOLVED AT SANTO DOMINGO

U. S. Customs Men Help Restore Finances Of Chaotic Republic--Eye-Witness Of Past Disturbances Tells Story---Secretary Knox Interested

These are troublous times in the republic of Santo Domingo. Revolution and internal dissent are sweeping through the land, and the United States has been forced to take a hand in the game, and has recently dispatched gunboats and cruisers to protect American interests there. And American interests in Santo Domingo mean far more than the property and personal rights of citizens of the United States, for under treaty Uncle Sam holds the receivership of the Dominican customs, guaranteeing with the revenues the national debt, and thereby protecting the country from foreign powers.

The serious situation now existing in Santo Domingo is the direct result of native resentment against American interference, however well meant, and the writing on the wall has been readable for four years.

Of great interest, then, is a story of the tangled and strained relations between the American customs officers and the native Dominicans, written by Laurence Redington of the Star-Bulletin staff, who spent several months in Santo Domingo studying the conditions that have resulted in embroiling the United States in West Indian politics.

As a special writer for the New York Herald, Mr. Redington went to Hayti in 1908, when that country was in the throes of one of the worst revolutions the West Indies have ever seen, and later he crossed into Santo Domingo, making an unusual trip through the wild mountain country on the border between Santo Domingo and Hayti, where Uncle Sam has the greatest trouble in preventing smuggling.

The story reprinted below was published in the New York Herald May 24, 1908. Many of the incidents descriptive of the thrilling life of the customs guards have been omitted here for lack of space, but the clear statement of conditions then existing, as described by an eyewitness, helps to focus current events.

It is peculiarly interesting that Secretary Knox, on his recent visit to Hawaii, displayed much interest in the Santo Domingan situation, and on learning that a member of the Star-Bulletin staff had a personal knowledge of the circumstances, asked for all the information, written and verbal, that he could give.

Shorn of considerable descriptive writing, and boiled down to facts, Mr. Redington's story of the troubles in Santo Domingo is as follows:

BY LAURENCE REDINGTON.

Down in the heart of the tropics, in the most out of the way corner of obscure Santo Domingo, a handful of American patriots are fighting against almost overwhelming odds for one of the fundamental principles of our government. They are patriots, and at the same time ex-patriots. Patriots of the highest and best type because they have turned their backs on civilization and taken up a life of hardship and danger to help their country "make good" the principles of the Monroe Doctrine; ex-patriots because they are fighting for an alien people under a foreign flag.

Appointed for dangerous service on foreign soil, they are yet denied the protection and inspiration of the Stars and Stripes. They are fighting for the prestige of America, and consequently for the whole American people, but the home government washes its hands of them once they are on the firing line, and even the pittance that they receive in return for their services comes from a foreign treasury.

These "men without a country" are the American officers of the Customs and Frontier Guard of the Republic of Santo Domingo, appointed under the American receivership of Santo Domingo's finances, which was instituted three years ago when the United States stepped into the breach and guaranteed the payment of the Dominican national debt in order to prevent several European Powers from invading Dominican territory and taking by force what they were unable to get as their just dues from the weak and bankrupt government. The United States instituted the receivership and undertook the collection of the customs revenues, thereby guaranteeing an honest administration of the finances and the ultimate payment of the national debt.

To collect the revenues on the three seacoast sides of the republic was comparatively easy, but to patrol the wild mountain frontier between Santo Domingo and Hayti and to collect duties from the lawless inhabitants, who owned allegiance to no government at all and who looked on smuggling as one of their inalienable rights, was quite another matter. It was to deal with this frontier problem that a body of picked men, officered by the most daring and experienced Americans that could be found in the various branches of the United States government service, was organized under the name of the Customs and Frontier Guard. The results accomplished by this guard, undergoing many hardships and dangers, have been far reaching and have made possible an increase in volume of the lawful business. But at what a cost!

While the American officers have been collecting duties from the people of the frontier the smugglers have taken a toll of blood. Eighteen per cent of the entire number of Americans assigned to the frontier during the twenty-seven months the guard has been in service have been killed or wounded. The Americans on the Dominican frontier are little better than moving targets, and hardly a week passes without a Dominican or a Hytian indulging in a little target practice. Every man's hand is against the "Americanos," and there is only one ending to service on the frontier—an ending under a pile of stones among the palms, with nothing but a rough wooden cross to mark the spot.

I was in Hayti at the time of the recent revolution there, and hearing in Port au Prince stories of the wild and hazardous life that the officers of the frontier guard led I determined to make a trip overland across the mountains of Hayti and Santo Domingo and see frontier conditions as they actually existed. I reached the line and saw for myself the splendid work that the Americans there are doing in the face of privation and danger. I stayed at the frontier forts and lived with the men of the guard, and in this way was able to get at first hand a true picture of the life led by these soldiers of fortune, who are soldiers in fact as well.

During the long days spent in riding the interminable Dominican trails across the mountains and the evenings spent in the forts which have recently been built for the greater safety of the guard, or at the hut of some friendly native if darkness caught us far from one of the custom houses, I managed to draw out, incident by incident, the whole murderous story of the American "occupation" of Santo Domingo.

These frontier Americans are not at all the type of swashbuckling adventurers who strut through the pages of filibustering fiction, accounting single handed for whole regiments of "greasers." On the contrary, they are for the most part the quiet, close lipped type who do things all the time, but say things only occasionally. Constantly subjected to the fire of guerilla warfare, the officers of the guard go serenely about their duties, riding with a finger literally on the trigger of the Winchester that is always ready for action across their knees, and taking an attempt to assassinate them as a regular part of the day's work. Possibly they may even forget to mention a stray bullet from the bush on their return to the fort.

"These Dominicans are the worst shots in the world, with the possible exception of the Haytians," was the way Inspector McMannus, of the guard explained the secret of the charmed life which some of the officers seem to bear. "If they could shoot even a little bit they would bet us all in a month, and I can tell you there would be some celebrating along the frontier if we Americans were out of the way. Then, again, these fellows who make all our trouble are cowards at heart, and they know that if they step out in the trail for a fair shot at one of us it's better than even money that we'll plug him first. We are all dead shots, and none of use would think of putting his nose outside the fort without a whole arsenal, more or less. We know these trails so well that we have all the likely places for an ambush spotted, and we keep a pretty sharp lookout when we come on these bad places. If we see a shaking bush or anything that looks like foul play we let go at the place with our rifle just on general principles. The people hereabouts are all wise to this, and so they don't really give themselves a fair chance to pot us."

"But they managed to pot you; how do you account for that?" I asked, for McMannus was just recovering from a bullet through the shoulder, received last November, when he rode with his life in hand to the rescue of one of his troopers.

"Oh, I guess I was a bit careless," replied McMannus. "I'll tell you about it." And he did, but his description of the incident was as dry as an official report, with all his own doings boiled down to mere facts, and I prefer to tell the story as I heard it from the others—from Inspectors Hollesen and Farbush and from some of the men of McMannus' own guard, who believe him to be the greatest man in the whole West Indies.

Close to the north shore Etang Sumatre, and just at the base of the rugged mountain ridge that marks the dividing line between the republics of Hayti and Santo Domingo, stands the stone custom house of El Fondo, built last year to afford the frontier guard a place of refuge in case of trouble and strong enough to stand an extended siege. The only passable trail across the mountains for many miles in either direction runs within a stone's throw of the fort, and as it commands the water as well as the land route, El Fondo is one of the most important houses on the frontier and a strong detachment of the guard is usually kept there.

Last November three American officers—Inspector John P. Hollesen, commanding, and Inspectors Edgar Furbush and Irvine S. McMannus—and about twenty Dominican troopers were stationed there. McMannus, who commanded the district of Barahona on the southeast frontier, had come up from his own district with reinforcements, as there were reports of trouble near El Fondo, and it was thought wise to concentrate a strong garrison at that point.

The next post to El Fondo is in the village of Jimini, four hours' ride to the southward. Jimini is on the isthmus that separates Lake Sumatre from that mysterious inland sea of Santo Domingo, Lake Enriquillo. The village consists of a half dozen palm huts, built in a little clearing in the jungle, and the guard post is situated near the edge of the clearing—badly situated, from a stragetic standpoint.

For several weeks there had been murmurs of discontent against the central government, and a little band of chronic trouble makers and malcontents, under the leadership of General Jose Gonzales, had been fanning the flame of revolution by circulating the story that the "Americanos" would end by taking the country for themselves, and that no time should be lost in driving the guard from the frontier. To the wild mountaineer of the Dominican and Haytian frontier the word liberty is misconstrued for license, and although he actually has no voice in the government of the country, he is tenacious of his imagined rights, and the thought of annexation by a foreign Power is like the proverbial red rag to a bull. So "Down with the Americanos!" became the catchword of the incipient revolution, and soon the handful of men under the leadership of Gonzales were ripe for any trouble.

To open the ball in proper Dominican style Gonzales fell on a native trooper doing patrol duty between El Fondo and Jimini, and as the man was known to be faithful to the guard it was determined to carry him to Jimini and there torture him as a warning to the others. Gonzales and a few men, with their prisoner, swooped down on the Custom House at Jimini and took the place without the firing of a shot, the guards on duty taking to the trails through the cactus, only too glad to get away from such an unpleasant neighborhood.

Inspector McMannus, with a sergeant and three men, was riding from Arroyo Blanco, on the shores of Lake Enriquillo, to El Fondo, and hearing from one of the fugitives what was happening at Jimini he at once changed his course to go to the rescue of his unfortunate trooper. He sent a messenger to Inspector Hollesen asking for reinforcements.

When McMannus and his forlorn hope reached Jimini about fifty revolutionists had taken up a position in the Custom House. But here is where Gonzales and his men had made a fatal mistake, for the Custom House is a flimsy affair of palms, and when McMannus, quick to see his opportunity, approached through the jungle in the rear of the building and opened fire the revolutionists were caught like rats in a trap, and, raked by a hot fire from Winchesters and Belgians, they were forced to take to the open. Here they made a stand, and when McMannus and his men made a dash across the open to the hut where the captured trooper was being held Gonzales and his men let go a regular hail of bullets.

But while the recolutionists were shooting in the air or whereyer their guns happened to be pointing when they pulled the trigger (which is a trick common to most Dominicans) the troopers were shooting to kill, and after one exchange of volleys the revolutionists broke ranks and took to the bush.

Gonzales, braver or more foolhardy than the rest, and humiliated by defeat at the hands of such a small detachment of the hated frontier guard, stopped long enough for a deliberate shot at McMannus, across the little square. The bullet found its mark, and McMannus pitched over on his face stunned by a ball through the left shoulder.

But McMannus is of the breed that "gets his man" no matter what happens, and before Gonzales could gain the shelter of a house the wounded officer was on his knees, and his Winchester cracked twice in such quick succession that the shots sounded like one report. Both balls went home, and Gonzales was dead before he knew what had struck him. As he fell the captured trooper, whom McMannus had himself liberated, ran across the square and emptied his revolver in the dead man's face, just to make sure of him.

When Hollesen arrived with the few men that he could take from El Fondo McMannus lay unconscious and his sergeant was also wounded. But General Gonzales and four of his followers were stretched out on the grass, while several wounded men had been taken into the jungle by their companions. That was the end of the revolution for the time being.

In addition to the Dominican and Haytian smugglers and the Dominican revolutionists the frontier guard has also to deal at times with the Haytian government troops.

There is a long standing dispute between Santo Domingo and Hayti over the boundary line, and great sections of mountain land lie in this contested territory. The Haytians are much more numerous than the Dominicans, and as a result they are constantly encroaching on Dominican territory, and their military outposts are being pushed further and further east.

It is part of the duty of the frontier guard to patrol the frontier and prevent these depredations, and although the two countries are nominally at peace a brush with the Haytian soldiers is by no means uncommon. Last January Inspectors Hollesen and Furbush, with a small detachment of the guard, came unexpectedly upon a Haytian outpost and were fired on without even a challenge. The Americans were not very sure of their ground and did not return fire, and no casulties resulted.

This rough sketch of the life of the frontier guard officers would not be complete without a word concerning Walter M. St. Elmo, the brains of the organization, who from frequent tours of inspection along the entire frontier keeps his finger on the pulse of the people and directs the movements of his officers from headquarters in San Juan.

At one time a navy diver, and later a revenue officer in Puerto Rico, St. Elmo has the reputation of being the nerviest man on the frontier, and the General Receiver, Mr. Pullman, in Santo Domingo City, gives him a free hand in frontier affairs.

St. Elmo's office is on the outskirts of the town of San Juan, but although he frequently mounts his mule for long forced marches to Barahona, El Fondo, Commendador, Dajabon and Monte Christi, the frontier custom houses, he has only twice during the year and a half he has lived there walked in the streets of San Juan!

"I know how the people here feel," said St. Elmo, with a shrug of the shoulders when I expressed surprise at his statement that he was practically a prisoner in his own office.

"If I had any business with them I'd go quick enough, and, in fact, the two times I refer to were to search houses for contraband goods, but I know that I am cordially hated, and why complicate the situation? They spit at me on the streets, and if they tried to do me up I would have to teach them a lesson, and that might make complications in the capital. So I keep to myself."

In headquarters at San Juan they use Colt automatics instead of paper weights. St. Elmo laughed when he caught my look of surprise at the arsenal spread over the tables in every room.

"Yes," he said, "it's handier to have them round than to be always packing a gun in the house. I don't want to follow poor Thurston and Milbourn and the rest for a while yet, and so I've schooled myself to have a gun always within reach of my hand."

These are but a few of the incidents that have smeared the pages of frontier history with American blood since the receivership was instituted and the little band of patriots was sent out into a wild and inhospitable country with the curt instructions to "collect the customs and police the frontier."

For all I know, one or all of the good fellows that I slung my hammock with three months ago may have paid their toll to the frontier as those who came before have done. If every officer in the frontier guard was assassinated we in America might not hear of it for months, if at all, for, while the inspectors must be citizens of the United States of proved integrity and tested courage, they become employes of the Dominican government as soon as they don the frontier uniform and Washington bothers about them no more.

They have no illusions, these Dominican-Americans. They know very well that they count for nothing with the Dominican government, and that the people at home hardly know of their existence; but they count for a good deal on the frontier, and there they are giving their best years, and in some cases their lives, to "make good" the Monroe Doctrine. They are kings in their own little districts, it is true, but no Oriental despot, no hated sovereign of history ever sat on a more unstable throne. They live and breathe an atmosphere of treason and treachery, and their very existence depends on their quickness to punish, and their keenness to see danger before it is visible.

I have met a good many so called "soldiers of fortune," men who have led adventurers and exciting lives in odd corners of the world, but while for the most part these men were fighting impartially for just or unjust causes under alien flags, the American officers of the customs and frontier guards of Santo Domingo have the added incentive of fighting for American principles and American prestige. Here's to them!

WOULD BE MOTHER TO ALL SAN DIEGO

CHICAGO, Ill., Sept. 12.—Mrs. Rae Copely Raum, candidate for Mayor of San Diego, Cal., told last night how she would treat her people if elected to the office to which she aspires.

"If I am elected I will treat all the people as my children and I will have no favorite child. A city is like a household and should be governed as such. As San Diego is just developing from a border town into a metropolis, and while it is in a period of transition, we thought it best to have a woman mayor, because then all the men will do their level best to help her out."

Mrs. Raum is on a transcontinental automobile tour with her sister and some friends, and reached Chicago last night.